

Continuity and change – outline of a shared strategy.

1 Objectives:

- To achieve an effective third term, further establishing Labour as a party of Government.
- To win a fourth Labour term with Gordon Brown as Prime Minister with a significant working majority.
- To achieve a transition from Blair to Brown that is mutually enhancing and leads to further governmental and electoral success for Labour.
- To reverse the current “revival” of Tory fortunes and re-energise and re-motivate the Party.
- To turn current negatives into positives according to an agreed strategy implemented with commitment and goodwill.

2 The current situation:

Strengths:

- New Labour has fundamental strength. It has won three elections, reshaped and still dominates the political landscape, won the big political arguments of the last decade. The project started by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown in the early 1990's has succeeded beyond all expectations.
- Labour leads on the big issues: the economy; public services; investment.
- Tony Blair leads as best Prime Minister. Gordon Brown has the best approval ratings of any politician.
- Labour is the party of experience, strength, continuity.
- Though affection may be thin on the ground, even among opponents there is a grudging respect for what we have achieved and the way we keep going.

Weaknesses:

- There is a national mood of pessimism at odds with the reality of most people's lives, fuelled by a bored and cynical media desperate for a Tory revival under Cameron.
- Many people feel dissatisfied with the pace of change and of delivery.
- Levels of disengagement and disillusionment are high in the party and the electorate.

- Labour is believed to lack direction and the strength to implement its agenda.
- A sense of division at the top is affecting every level of our operation for the worse and some members of the public feel we care more about our own lives and jobs than theirs.
- Our experience and strength is being turned into a negative by a media gorging on the “newness” of DC.

Vulnerabilities:

- At the time of the next election the mood for change will be very strong and should not be underestimated in any way.
- Cameron has a clear repositioning strategy - attempting to win the centre; own the future; drive rift between Blair and Brown, present Blair as one-off aberration, Brown as old-fashioned reform-blocker.
- There are indications that votes we need to achieve victory are moving to him – Liberals; students; young voters; women.
- Conservative Party membership and supportive activism increase as ours decrease.
- Media support and financial backing for Cameron will be substantial.

Opportunities:

- We still have time to turn potential negatives to positives.
- Doubts are starting to surface about Cameron’s politics, sincerity and ability.
- Cameron’s social liberalism will win some voters but will deter others. 50% of Labour voters moved to the Liberals because of Iraq, 50% because of asylum
- The Liberal Democrats are almost certain to lose share and seats in the next election. Some of these voters will almost certainly come to us.
- The threat of a close contest with the Conservatives will mobilise Labour activists and voters.
- Partnership in the coming period will confound our critics, show we take the threat seriously but have a response to it.
- The renewal of New Labour has the potential to significantly increase our lead, re-engage the party and electorate.
- We have strength in depth.

3 Strategy:

- a. An integrated approach to the rest of the third term, working back from election strategy and message, election dividing lines, third term political success.
- b. Seeing the Parliament in four phases which all integrate, and which collectively form a cohesive and coherent whole.
 - Phase one: TB leadership, seeing through the latest phase of difficult reforms.
 - Phase two: handover, (**continuity** plus change.)
 - Phase three: GB leadership, (**continuity** plus **change**.)
 - Phase four: GB election campaigning and victory.
- c. The strategy that will underpin and integrate these four stages is:
 - New Labour as the constant core strategic and message anchor.
 - The theme of continuity plus change being laid down confidently by TB and GB.
 - The renewal of New Labour in all its aspects as the primary strategic task for the Parliament. Recognition that this is huge task, beginning under TB and to be accelerated under GB.
 - The next election as the starting point of strategy development: election message; election dividing lines; election policy, key campaigners, strategic defence and attack lines. Work back from that. Start work on it now.
 - An agreement that political renewal and an election focus cannot wait until there is a new leader but must be intrinsic to strategy now. A process TB can start, but which must have GB centrally involved, in charge of at least part of the process, and ready to accelerate.
 - Co-operation and mutual respect as the means of working through the whole Parliament, not just in the immediate future, avoiding at all costs the fatal election conflict that befell Clinton and Gore in 2000.
- d. The strategy that will underpin the next phase - TB leadership is:
 - Partnership at all levels: Publicly through public appearances, message and speeches, and an end to the ill discipline and loose briefing. Privately through shared working structures, shared strategy, a team founded on openness and trust, including new people from outside.
 - Shared TB and GB campaigning and arguing for the reform programme, visible and strong.

- Explicit recognition that GB is the next leader not just verbally but in attendance at key international meetings and in public statements and briefings about decision making re major issues for the future.
- A message that is anchored around reform but extends beyond reform to connection and renewal.
- An agreed written strategy for dealing with Cameron and the next Liberal democrat leader.
- A strategy for ensuring that GB is positioned and seen as a reforming modernising politician.
- A strategy for ensuring TB's departure is seen as a moment of recognition of his achievement but also a moment of renewal for New Labour.

4 The immediate political tasks are:

- To agree and implement a strategy for defining and dealing with Cameron.
- To exploit to our advantage the current disruption within the Liberal Democrat party.
- To ensure the political and legislative success of the current programme of reform and modernisation.
- To maximise success in the local elections.
- To begin the process of party renewal.

5 Implementation:

- Regular strategic meetings attended by TB/GB.
- Supported by a strategic group that will not necessarily include TB and GB, but will include senior people responsible for ensuring the joint strategy is imposed and implemented.
- Agreement in writing on a long-term and immediate strategy – a written six month plan, a 12 month plan, a 2-year plan.
- High profiles start to partnership phase. To be carefully planned and executed.

None of this will work unless there is an end to the mistrust and the factionalism that has bedevilled operations at every stage. If it does not end, the weaknesses above will be exacerbated, and the strengths will not be fully used.